



One Little Can

by David LaRochelle

RACHEL SCOWLED IN DISGUST as she walked to the school bus stop. Her neighborhood looked like a junkyard. The sidewalk was littered with newspapers and candy wrappers. The front door to Lee's Grocery was covered with ugly graffiti. It was spring, but instead of green grass and flowers, the yards seemed to be sprouting broken branches and trash.

"Yuck!" Rachel said as she brought her foot back to kick a soda can off the curb. Then she changed her mind, picked the can up, and tossed it into a litter basket on the corner. She hurried to meet her friends at the bus stop.

Mr. Lee scowled as he looked out his grocery store window. "Hmph," he said as the girl passed by. She's probably another troublemaker, he thought. One of those kids who spray-painted graffiti all over my door. Kids today are just no good.

To confirm his suspicion, the girl stepped back to kick a piece of garbage into the street. What she did next, though, surprised him. She bent down, picked up the old can, and dropped it into a trash can.

That's a switch, thought Mr. Lee.

All morning as he unboxed soup cans and cereal boxes, he kept picturing that girl. At noon, when he walked to the corner to mail a letter, he noticed the litter that had piled up in front of his store. He thought of that girl again, then got a broom and started sweeping the walk.



Mrs. Polansky peered out from between the window blinds in her living room. A crumpled sheet of newspaper blew into her yard and got snagged on a rosebush. She hated living across the street from Lee's Grocery. Customers were always dropping their trash in front of the store, and invariably it would blow into her yard.

Maybe I should write a letter to the city council, she thought, or call the mayor. If Mr. Lee is going to let his store be such an eyesore, maybe it should be shut down.

Just then Mr. Lee walked out his door. Mrs. Polansky quickly shut the blinds, but when she peeked out again, he was sweeping up the trash on his sidewalk.

That's a change, thought Mrs. Polansky.

A few minutes later, when she went to let her cat out, she noticed that the stray newspaper had unsnagged itself from her rosebush and was tumbling into the next yard. She caught a glimpse of Ms. Sinclair, her neighbor, frowning at her from the porch.

Mrs. Polansky looked around at her own unkempt yard.

"Well, Fluffy," she said to her cat, "Mr. Lee isn't the only one who can do a bit of outdoor spring cleaning."

She went inside and got her work gloves and a trash bag.

When Rachel got off the school bus that afternoon, the first thing she noticed was the woman planting geraniums around the edges of her front walk. A fat gray cat was swatting at a butterfly that flitted among the bright red blossoms. Hadn't that yard been strewn with dead branches and soggy newspapers this morning? Several other yards looked tidier, too. She even spotted a pair of crocuses peeking up from a freshly raked garden.

When she passed Lee's Grocery, Mr. Lee was out front painting his door the color of a spring sky. He smiled at her as she walked by.

Maybe my neighborhood doesn't look so bad after all, Rachel thought. She knelt down and picked up a lone candy bar wrapper, slam-dunked it into the litter basket, and sang out loud the rest of the way home. 

